

MACV Paper

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**THE EFFECT ON THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAMESE THINKING**

**Summary**

STATINTL

There is no good evidence that the program of US air strikes, either by themselves or in conjunction with other pressures on Hanoi, have caused the North Vietnamese leaders to seriously consider negotiating a genuine end to the war. Available evidence points to a determination on Hanoi's part to stick to its current position even if faced with a further escalation of the US bombings. At some time in the future the North Vietnamese may once again, as in January 1967, attempt to obtain a cessation of the air strikes without offering any significant quid pro quo of their own.

**New Tactics**

In January of this year, North Vietnam issued a new official statement setting forth its position on negotiations. DRV Foreign Minister Trinh publicly spelled out for the first time

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Hanoi's preconditions for agreeing to talks with the US--an unconditional cessation of the air strikes and all "other acts of war" against the DRV. Prior to Thanh's statement, the official DRV position had been the April 1965 "four point" stand proclaimed by Premier Pham Van Dong and updated in August 1965 by Ho Chi Minh. Under that formulation, a Geneva-type conference would be held once the US had "proved" by actual deeds that it "recognized" the four points as the basis for a final settlement of the war.

Intensive diplomatic and propaganda activity by Hanoi and the Soviet bloc on behalf of the January Trinh statement was designed to convince the US and world opinion that the DRV had made a significant concession in order to achieve peace. Several factors probably went into Hanoi's decision to issue the Trinh statement. One undoubtedly was the fact that the Soviet bloc had long been urging the North Vietnamese to take a more flexible stand on the subject of negotiations in order

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to garner more support around the world and, perhaps, to encourage opponents of Washington's policy on Vietnam within the US.

The growing disorder within Communist China in late 1966 may also have contributed to Hanoi's decision to make its January move. The North Vietnamese probably were afraid that the disarray in China might shortly lead to a situation in which the overland flow of Soviet military supplies to North Vietnam would be disrupted.

In addition, the North Vietnamese undoubtedly wanted to gain a respite from the damage inflicted by the air strikes and to that end, they may have reasoned that an offer such as that made by Trinh might result in a halt in the bombings without committing Hanoi to anything more than an agreement to talk.

#### Return to a Hard Line

It shortly became clear, however, that whatever Hanoi had in mind by issuing its January Foreign Ministry statement,

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it did not intend to agree to any sort of quid pro quo in the military field in return for a cessation of US attacks on the North. By late March Hanoi's public statements indicated that, for the time being at least, it had returned to a tough posture. Although Hanoi spokesmen continue to insist that Trinh's offer to talk is still open, other recent DRV statements have been stressing the four points and the demand that the US "prove" by deeds that it accepts them.

In part, Hanoi's return to a hard line may have been the result of reassurances from Peking that the flow of Soviet military goods would continue. In addition, following Phan Van Dong's trip to Moscow in April, Soviet bloc diplomats around the world have been dropping hints that the Soviets agreed to provide North Vietnam with more and better weapons. It also appears now that the Chinese have recently promised to up the level of their own support for Vietnam.

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Thus, there seems little likelihood that, in the near future, Hanoi will agree to talks on terms acceptable to the US. Moreover, the available evidence indicates that the North Vietnamese are preparing against a further escalation of the US air strikes, suggesting that they do not intend to change their current stand even if faced with more extensive damage. It is always possible that other factors such as the internal situation in China or developments in the war in South Vietnam will bring about some change in Hanoi's attitude. It does not appear, however, that the air strikes alone will accomplish such a change. It is also possible that Hanoi will make another gesture as it did in January to obtain a cessation of US air strikes without committing itself to any significant concession in return.

Hanoi's reaction to a deescalation, short of a cessation, in the bombing program would probably be to interpret it as a

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sign of weakness on the part of the US. North Vietnam has been throwing its entire air defense strength against recent US strikes in the Hanoi - Haiphong area. A deescalation coming after these attacks would almost certainly appear to Hanoi as a sign that its defenses had cost the US more than it wants to expend. North Vietnam would seek to make the most of such a deescalation by making extensive repairs to damaged facilities and by stockpiling supplies in case the air war should again be escalated.

#### Other Results of the Bombing

The US bombing program has also has an impact on certain other key North Vietnamese policy areas such as economic planning and foreign relations. By early 1966, the bombing had caused Hanoi to postpone its long range economic program and in particular its plans to create a heavy industrial base. Emphasis was placed, instead, on local self-sufficiency for each area of the country.

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Also as a result of the air strikes, the North Vietnamese had to seek massive new aid agreements from their allies-- chiefly China and the Soviet Union. The DRV needed not only modern air defense equipment--it did not even have a combat air force until after the US air strikes in August 1964--but also required continual transfusions of other war related goods such as trucks, bulldozers and bridge components. Thus, the US air strikes have made it imperative for Hanoi to maintain cordial relations with both Moscow and Peking, if it intends to continue the war on a large scale.